

New AVAs expected to help Idaho wine industry continue rapid growth

By Sean Ellis, February 26, 2016



Idaho winemakers and vineyard owners listen to updates on the health of the state's different wine regions Feb. 25 during the Idaho Wine Commission's annual meeting.

Idaho's fast-growing wine industry is showing no signs of slowing down and wineries and grape growers were upbeat about the industry's future during the Idaho Wine Commission's annual meeting Feb. 24-25.

BOISE — The addition of two new "AVA" wine designations in Idaho is expected to help the state's burgeoning wine industry continue its rapid growth.

During the Idaho Wine Commission's annual meeting Feb. 24-25, representatives from the state's various wine regions provided mostly upbeat reports.

Much of the excitement surrounded the new American Viticultural Areas, which are federally designated wine grape growing regions with distinct growing conditions, boundaries and history.

The Eagle Foothills AVA became Idaho's second AVA late last year, joining the Snake River Valley AVA, which was established in 2007.

The proposed Lewis-Clark Valley AVA in Northern Idaho is expected to receive final approval within the next few months, said Colter's Creek Winery winemaker Melissa Sanborn.

"We're almost there," she said.

Now that the Eagle Foothills AVA in southwestern Idaho has been approved, 3 Horse Ranch Vineyards owner Martha Cunningham said she is working with the city of Eagle to help it promote the wine area.

"I want to help the city of Eagle identify itself as the gateway to the Eagle AVA," she said.

The Eagle foothills are on the verge of attracting a lot of new vineyard acres, which is something the Idaho wine industry needs more of, Cunningham said.

"The foothills are primed. They are ready," she said.

Eagle Foothills is a sub-AVA of the Snake River Valley AVA.

IWC Executive Director Moya Shatz Dolsby said there is a lot of excitement about the new AVAs. The number of Idaho wineries has increased from 38 to 51 since the Snake River Valley AVA was approved.

The new designation announcements "basically put Idaho on the map, again," she said. "It says that Idaho's wine industry is a force to be reckoned with and respected."



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The Sunny Slope Wine Trail region, which is located within the Snake River Valley AVA, has experienced rapid sales growth since receiving a specialty crop grant to promote the area from the Idaho State Department of Agriculture in 2014, said Bev Williamson, sales and marketing director for Williamson Orchards and Vineyards.

When a loose coalition of wineries in the area started meeting over coffee several years ago, “The hope was that we could divert traffic off of I-84 and hopefully funnel (it) into some of our tasting rooms,” she said.

The grant has allowed the group to promote the region heavily and since it was awarded, winery sales have increased 50 percent, Williamson said.

“Things have really started to rock and roll,” said Williamson, who also said the SSWT region might seek its own sub-AVA designation.

Telaya Wine Co. owner Earl Sullivan said the Boise area’s emerging urban wine scene is also growing rapidly. It includes six wineries in Garden City and two in downtown Boise, which is five minutes away.

“We are housed right next to the major population base of Idaho,” he said. “We’re very happy with the urban wine experience. I think urban wineries really do have a place in the grand scheme of Idaho wine.”

